

## Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

### Organisational updates for the Big Update, 10 March 2021

*The following members of the HRBA have kindly supplied updates on recent and planned activity. Although they have been lightly edited, they vary in length, detail and style. They are presented in roughly alphabetical order.*

#### **1 Arthur Rank Centre**

To note the resource page which covers a wide range of relevant queries on rural church buildings: <https://arthurrankcentre.org.uk/church-life/rural-church-buildings-resource-2019/>

#### **2 Association of English Cathedrals**

<https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/>

2020 did not turn out for us as planned! In early March we were all ready to go with our Year of Cathedrals Year of Pilgrimage, celebrating the many anniversaries falling last year and encouraging people to visit cathedrals and see themselves as pilgrims. Every cathedral had set a date for a Cathedrals at Night evening and all the publicity material was ready.

Instead cathedrals had a fight for survival on their hands, with lockdowns, tiered restrictions and closures, and limited capacity when they were able to open for both worship and visitors in a Covid-safe way. Visitor numbers dropped dramatically, especially in London where overseas tourists make up the majority of those visiting. Cathedral income flows were hit badly. At one point approximately 90% of cathedral staff were furloughed, and many cathedrals undertook painful restructurings to reduce staff numbers and costs. Cathedrals between them received many millions of pounds in grants, but some received nothing at all. The Church Commissioners assisted to the greatest extent possible, ensuring cathedrals could continue to employ their stonemasons and works department teams and their lay clerks, and also providing grants for cathedrals to recruit staff to work on digital provision of worship services and communications.

The main area of panel support has been online strategic planning workshops; cathedrals and major churches recognised that they needed to revisit and rewrite their plans in the light of the pandemic's impact.

The AEC team has focussed on helping cathedrals to work together. The communications team has posted stories and kept cathedrals in the public eye. We have shared government guidance and information to assist with each phase of the pandemic.

We are working to build public confidence that cathedrals will be safe places to visit once they are allowed to reopen – so we can resurrect some of our plans for Year of Cathedrals Year of Pilgrimage and welcome congregations and visitors again.

### **3 Baptist Union of Great Britain**

<https://www.baptist.org.uk>

The Baptist Union of Great Britain's Heritage Property Initiative, funded by Historic England, has been running since June last year. The initiative is:

- providing [grants towards Quinquennial Inspections](#)
- gathering information about the listed buildings cared for by churches in membership with the Union
- creating new support materials including this recent [Webinar on Quinquennial Inspections](#)
- looking to recruit a part-time Assistant Support Officer

For more information or to request details of the Assistant Support Officer role, please email [listedbuildings@baptist.org.uk](mailto:listedbuildings@baptist.org.uk)

### **4 Catholic Church (England and Wales)**

[www.cbcew.org.uk/category/cbcew/liturgy/heritage-and-patrimony/patrimony/](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/category/cbcew/liturgy/heritage-and-patrimony/patrimony/)

There are 31 repair projects on Grade I and II\* Catholic churches in England currently underway following the grant of £3m from Historic England's Capital Works Fund (part of the DCMS's Cultural Recovery Fund programme announced last August) to the Catholic Trust of England and Wales (CaTEW). Works have to be completed by March 31<sup>st</sup>, a challenging deadline given the recent extremes of winter weather, but projects are proceeding well. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is enormously grateful to Historic England for this funding which is enabling some very urgent repair works to be undertaken on key historic churches.

The Taking Stock website ([www.taking-stock.org.uk](http://www.taking-stock.org.uk)) has been updated very recently and now includes the architectural and historical information on Catholic churches in the Diocese of East Anglia (the last of the English dioceses to be surveyed), and also the three Welsh dioceses (Cardiff, Menevia and Wrexham). Details of upgradings and new listings have been included. The Taking Stock Project, part funded by Historic England, is now complete and the website provides an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the history and design of Catholic churches in England and Wales.

## 5 Church in Wales

[www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/church-property/](http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/church-property/)

Like everyone we have learned to adapt and have developed at pace materials to support local churches both with opening churches safely but also to conduct on line worship and outreach. Stories of local church impact in communities are so heartening.

Some specifics we are working on that may be of interest:

- We are focussing attention on net zero carbon. We are appointing our first paid post in this area with a new Climate Change Champion
- Much work is taking place on thinking carefully about churches that may need to close as we emerge from the pandemic. We are developing better processes to ‘close churches well’ and care for them properly until new futures can be found
- We are working closely with the Welsh Places of Worship Forum to see how it can best connect with and support grass roots people caring for places of worship – on line activities such as webinars have opened up new possibilities

## 6 Church of England

[www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare)

*Becky Clark, Director of the Church of England Cathedral and Church Buildings Division, is presenting at the Big Update.*

## 7 Churches Conservation Trust

[www.visitchurches.org.uk/](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/)

The CCT suffered a **considerable loss of income** due to there being very limited visitors and events across the year, although we have remained open where we can for individual prayer and hope to be open to local communities in April. Work is ongoing on providing confidence for **communities to put on events in their churches** as soon as they are able to.

The **Thursday Lunchtime lectures** that we have been able to put on, free of charge, have been a real hit during lockdown. Join us at 12.50pm each week for Church of the Week and a live lecture on aspects of church history. You can also catch up with past lectures on Facebook <https://m.facebook.com/ChurchesConservationTrust/> and You Tube [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC43GF8\\_GKl6pXSYr-GGGbRg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC43GF8_GKl6pXSYr-GGGbRg)

We benefitted from a £1.6m investment from the **Heritage Stimulus Fund** and works are on course to be finished on time to 26 churches (thank you to HE and DCMS).

We have faced considerable delays in **our major NLHF funded projects** but we continue to press on and we will complete them this year:

- Seventeen Nineteen, Holy Trinity, Sunderland. This Grade I listed Georgian church is being transformed into a new cultural venue opening in 2021.
- Sound & Arts at St Swithun's, Worcester. The Grade I listed St Swithun's Church in the city centre is being turned into an innovative sensory space, that will demonstrate the potential of sound and art to engage a greater connection to heritage. It will open in 2021.

The Regeneration team has developed an ambitious project that will repair and regenerate the Grade I listed **St Peter's, Sudbury** as a cultural and community centre for the town. We received a successful decision for our NLHF R2 bid in September 2020 and the team are working hard to deliver this project.

Champing™ is the unique concept of camping overnight in historic churches. Last season due to the pandemic, we opened our churches later than normal. However, we still had a successful season and had nearly 1000 individual Champers stay from July - October at 18 churches (we also had 50 dogs stay too).

The Regeneration team's consultancy work recently includes carrying out consultancy work for the Historic Chapels Trust, St Cuthbert's Darlington and Grimsby Minster. The team ran community-led regeneration workshops and training for a range of individuals such as postgraduate students and professionals within the heritage sector.

## **8 Church Recording Society**

[www.churchrecordingsociety.org.uk/](http://www.churchrecordingsociety.org.uk/)

The Church Recording Society is the new body, a registered charity, set up to provide a co-ordinating body for Church Recording when it ceased to be a volunteering arm of The Arts Society (TAS) at national level on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. Most of us still belong to our local TAS societies which continue to support Church Recording so the severance is only at national level. If you visit our new website at [churchrecordingsociety.org.uk](http://churchrecordingsociety.org.uk), you will see that our ethos is still the same, to provide full and researched records of the interiors and artefacts found inside churches for the benefit of the churches, their communities and various relevant archive bodies. We have completed over 2,000 Records across the UK so far.

For more information, email [liz.ch.recording@gmail.com](mailto:liz.ch.recording@gmail.com).

## 9 Diocese of Ely – REACH project

[www.elydiocese.org/reach-ely/](http://www.elydiocese.org/reach-ely/)

An update, following on from our presentation about the Churches and Communities Audit to the HRBA Members Briefing in December:

- The Churches and Community Audit was published in December and we received responses from around 2/3 of our churches during January.
- Now in the process of helping the remaining churches complete their audits.
- Barriers to completion have predictably included poor web access and lack of IT confidence among respondees
- We also gave churches the unofficial option of responding on paper so we can enter the results on their behalf.
- Individual churches will be presented with their individual results in pdf format
- We are now trialling a locally focussed follow-up survey tool for individual churches to engage directly with local residents – this to be targeted to those churches identified in the Churches and Community Audit as having particular opportunities and needs that will be met by this type of survey.
- The data has been collected to sit alongside existing datasets, giving local context to the existing figures and statistics

## 10 Friends of Friendless Churches

- Since the last Big Update in December 2019, Friends of Friendless Churches has taken five places of worship into their care.
- They are currently running 21 repair projects in England and Wales, after being awarded £1m from DCMS Heritage Stimulus Fund in England and £75,000 from the Welsh Government’s Culture Recovery Fund.
- Throughout 2020, they focussed on developing their online presence. Their online following has increased by 85%, totalling almost 60,000 across four channels, and reaching approx. 3.5m people monthly.
- In 2021, they will be moving offices, develop a new members’ publication, renew their website, work with communities and supporters to gradually resume full use of their church – and of course, take more places of worship into their care when they close, and repair more buildings.

## 11 The Heritage Alliance

[www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/](http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/)

*Lizzie Clitheroe-West, Chief Executive of the Heritage Alliance, is presenting at the Big Update.*

## 12 Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue Project

- The urgent repairs to stabilise the Merthyr Tydfil synagogue building, making it wind and watertight and safe, have been completed.
- The building was filmed and photographed before and during the repair works to be used in future promotional material and this included conducting a series of local interviews.
- The consultant commissioned to prepare a detailed Business Plan is finishing her work.
- The next phase will be submitting a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund as we pursue the vision of creating a Welsh Jewish Heritage Centre.
- An important recent local development was the announcement of the £50 million Cyfarthfa Development Plan for Merthyr Tydfil which, if realised, will be a major boost for the town and our own synagogue project. We will be able to make a distinct contribution in addressing complementary issues around diversity, inter-cultural dialogue etc.
- Artist's impressions of what the eventual Heritage Centre might look like when completed have been prepared.
- The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) carried out a laser scan survey of the building to provide a complete 3D recording, which the Commission is lodging with the National Monuments of Wales archive.
- Two high-profile Patrons have been recruited for the project – comedian David Baddiel and philanthropist Sir Michael Moritz.

## 13 National Churches Trust

### 13.1 Grant programmes:

All of our grant programmes continue to run as usual through 2021.

- We are particularly keen to welcome applications into our Foundation grant programme, for maintenance work. To avoid disappointment please don't wait until the end of the year to apply. Within the programme, the Pilgrim Trust has made £60,000 available for churches in Scotland –find out more here.
- We will be running some online grant enquiry sessions for prospective applicants. Sign up to the grants e-newsletter to stay tuned  
<https://mailchi.mp/nationalchurchestrust.org/grants-sign-up-for-our-e-newsletter>

### 13.2 Northern Ireland

- Our NLHF funded Treasure Ireland project:

- Our Northern Ireland based Church Support Officer has been in place since September 2020; since the project started we have run 6 training workshops
- The newly formed Northern Grants Committee awarded 7 grants in November 2020. We have received 23 applications into the second round;
- We are working towards extending the MaintenanceBooker service into Northern Ireland in June 2020;
- Additional funding has been secured from the Historic Environment Division's Covid-19 Culture, Languages, Arts and Heritage Support Programme for capacity building and capital grants:
  - In addition to making some grant awards, this has enabled us to extend for a further round the Northern Ireland Maintenance Project (in partnership with Ulster Historic Churches Trust);
  - We are also running project development workshops for places of worship in Northern Ireland throughout March:  
<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/events>

### 13.3 **Sacred Wales project:**

This has continued apace, with just a short extension to March 2021:

- We have created a suite of new content, including three chronicles of unmissable churches along the Wales Way, churches with castles for neighbours, sacred landscapes and tidal islands. We've worked with the Wales Coast Path project to develop nine new walking routes and created pages for the Cistercian Way and the North Wales Pilgrimage Route.
- We have delivered 12 online training sessions, with over 450 attendees.
- All of this has been heavily promoted
- All our Wales content can be found in the visitor guide on [ExploreChurches](https://www.explorechurches.org/cymru) or at [explorechurches.org/cymru](https://www.explorechurches.org/cymru)

### 13.4 **The House of Good report**

- This report which was launched in October has been well received and we are now concentrating on helping churches to use its findings to measure and articulate the value they provide in their own communities.

## 14 **TC Organ Trust**

The TC Organ Trust is still in the toils of formation but it is already busy trying to make sure that the end of lockdowns and churches taking stock will not cause a sudden loss of organs.

- A brief survey of the last five years' doings of DACs and the other Church organizations central bodies has been commissioned

- This is designed to see where losses are happening and on what scale
- With particular reference to church closures : in Scotland these will soon be catastrophically high but also in less-favoured parts of the country, both urban and rural, the part organs have played and should still play in our culture is at serious risk.
- We hope also to help with the maintenance and bringing back into public use of organs as in e.g. church openings for coffee and tea by involving local associations of organists.

Martin Renshaw